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SUBJECT: DOMINICAN ELECTIONS 2006 SERIES #2: ALFREDO
PACHECO: RISING STAR IN DOMINICAN POLITICS

REF: SANTO DOMINGO 0508

¶1. (SBU) This is the second cable in a series reporting on
the upcoming elections in the Dominican Republic .

Alfredo Pacheco: Rising Star in Dominican Politics

Opposition PRD National District president Cesar Cabrera gave
political officer at lunch March 2 a glimpse of the
high-stakes campaign for mayor of the capital city. Cabrera
foresaw that younger politicians, especially mayoral
candidate Alfredo Pacheco, will supplant discredited PRD
leaders in the next few years.

Pacheco, who last June trailed incumbent mayor Roberto
Salcedo of the ruling PLD in voter preferences 27%-62%, now
leads by 47%-43%, according to a poll trusted by Cabrera (who
dismissed another poll that gave Pacheco a 13% lead).

Pacheco has done this on a shoestring; campaign spending so
far has been only 15 million pesos (465,000 dollars). But
businesses that have benefited from Pacheco's widely admired
performance in Congress have contributed favors in kind,
particularly advertising. From October through January,
Pacheco's television ads were aired gratis on three channels
owned by communications magnate Pepin Corripio. Now the ads
are being run at below-market prices. Similar support from
rum distillery heir "Poppy" Bermudez is due to Pacheco's
principled opposition to a legislative attempt to close down
the Bermudez TV channel. Gomez Diaz, another TV broadcaster,
is backing Pacheco Dominican National Brewery's owner, the
Santiago-based Leon Jimenez group, is also kicking in.
Mayor Salcedo of course has his own stable of campaign
contributors from local business.

Pacheco is a new breed of Dominican politician, judged Cabrera. Many seek an "economic career," combining business and politics for personal gain; but Pacheco has built a service-oriented "political career." "More powerful than most, he still lives in a humble house in the (low-income) barrio of Cristo Rey -- it's incredible." He appeals to voters as an ethical man-of-the-pueblo.

Pacheco is running under the banner of the opposition "Pink Alliance," which includes the PRD, PRSC and five minor parties. The alliance, the first of its kind in Dominican congressional and municipal elections, is requiring strenuous effort by organizers to keep the troops in line. That's Cabrera's job in the National District. He works from 7 a.m. to midnight, meeting individually with candidates for seats in congress (18) and city council (37), including many who did not bother to run in the party primary.

Nationwide, the Alliance has forced some of the PRD contenders to withdraw in favor of Reformistas, usually not without protests or intervention by local party chiefs. PRD mayoral candidates traditionally have designated some of the candidates to their cities' councils. And this year ambitious PRD president Ramon Alburquerque is trying to impose his own people, groused Cabrera. He was looking forward to the end of the process, the proclamation of the Alliance candidates in each locality in early March.

Complementing the favorable prospects in the capital mayoral race is Alliance candidate for senator Johnny Jones (PRSC), who is ahead of PLD candidate Reinaldo Pared Perez according to Cabrera. But Cabrera failed to mention a development that broke in the news media on March 3: prominent PRSC congresswoman Alexandra Izquierdo broke with the "Pink Alliance" and signed onto the ruling PLD's campaign as the vice-mayoral candidate, a move that can only boost Salcedo's chances. Izquierdo was the first vice president of the PRSC and as such was prohibited by party statutes from being a candidate.

In the capital's outskirts, the PRD mayors of Santo Domingo North, West, and East are heading toward reelection, as is the PRD candidate in Los Alcarrizos, in Cabrera's view. But the popular PRD mayor of Boca Chica was pushed aside for a Reformista who has less support. The Alliance senatorial candidate in Santo Domingo province, PRSC elder Vctor Gomez Berges, "has not taken off," and the outcome is uncertain against a lackluster PLD candidate. The PLD may also pick up votes from a surprise announcement on March 2: Retired Major General Juan Bautista Rojas Tabar, a former defense minister reportedly frustrated in his aspiration to be the Alliance candidate for mayor of Santo Domingo East, was brought back to active duty by President Fernandez as director of the Airport Security Corps (CESA). Cabrera saw this as a pre-election deal that included naming Rojas's wife to be the ruling party's vice-mayoral candidate in Santo Domingo East.

The nationwide outlook favors the PRD, according to Cabrera. The PRD will retain a majority of the Senate -- the PLD might get 5 senators of 32 -- and a plurality of the lower house, with the opposition alliance in control. The PRD will also control a majority of the 154 municipal governments, but fewer than at present (115). Fernandez, a popular president, is remote from his party's base and can't mobilize it effectively.

Who controls the PRD nationally and is best placed to run for president in 2008? None of the old lions, said Cabrera -- not ex-president Hipolito Mejia, ex-vice president Milagros Ortiz-Bosch, or ex-tourism minister "Fello" Subervi (Cabrera's long-time mentor). All three refused to run for party president for the 2005-2009 term, preferring to keep their options open for the national campaign in 2008. In doing so they distanced themselves from the party machine -- which will soon pass them by, said Cabrera.

If a presidential convention were held today, former public

works minister in the Mejia administration Miguel Vargas Maldonado would win the nomination, according to Cabrera's contacts among local PRD chiefs. Wealthy businessman Maldonado is investing money and hard work building a campaign structure to support his candidacy.

No PRD candidate, even Vargas Maldonado, can beat Leonel Fernandez's bid for reelection in 2008, Cabrera predicted. But by 2012, a new generation of the "Pink Alliance" will get its chance, and Pacheco will be its brightest star. Others will include PRD secretary general Orlando Jorge Mera, son of a former Dominican president; PRSC secretary general Victor Gomez Casanova, son of Gomez Berges; and Reformista congressman Victor "Ito" Bisoño Haza.

Cabrera cautioned that political forecasts are risky, even for two years hence. The PRD won overwhelmingly in the last legislative and municipal elections (2002), but then "took a drubbing" in the 2004 vote that elected Fernandez.

¶2. (U) Drafted by Bainbridge Cowell .

¶3. (U) This piece and others in our series can be consulted at our SIPRNET web site (<http://www.state.sgov.gov/p/wha/santodomingo>) along with extensive other material.
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